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DECENTRALIZATION OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES
OF THE UNITED NATIONS: THE NEW FUNCTIONS OF THE
REGIONAL COMMISSIONS IN REGIONAL AND
INTERREGIONAL CO-OPERATION

Note by the Secretariat

CONTENT

	Page
Introduction	1
1. Role of the regional commissions within the United Nations system	4
2. Co-ordination and co-operation at the regional level	6
3. Participation in programme planning: biennial programme of work and medium-term plan	7
4. Regional contribution to global policy making	8
5. Common definitions of regions and subregions	9
6. Operational responsibilities and executing agency status with regard to development activities financed by UNDP ...	11
7. Regional and interregional economic co-operation among developing countries	12
8. Streamlining the conference and Secretariat structures ...	13
9. Delegation of authority and provision of resources	14



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INTRODUCTION

At its thirty-fifth session, the General Assembly, when dealing with the question of the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system, adopted decision 35/440.^{1/} The decision invites the regional commissions to consider further at their plenary sessions in 1981 the implications for their role and functions of General Assembly resolutions 32/197 and 33/202, in the light, *inter alia*, of the observations and recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General, particularly 76 to 79 thereof.^{2/} It also invites them to report thereon, through the Economic and Social Council, for action by the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session.

Practically since the inception of the Organization, it has been pointed out within the United Nations that many problems relating to economic and social development and co-operation could be tackled more effectively in the geographical regions where they originate than in the central headquarters of the United Nations and its system of organizations for development consequently, it was considered not merely desirable but inevitable to arrive at a deconcentration or decentralization of economic and social activities towards those geographical areas. In the United Nations, this decentralization initially took the form of regionalization, through the regional economic commissions which were set up between 1947 and 1973.

In view of the growing importance attached in international and regional forums to the questions of development and economic and social planning, and to United Nations participation in activities relating to them, in the late 1950s a movement began in the General Assembly and in the Economic and Social Council aimed at achieving greater geographical decentralization of United Nations economic and social activities, while at the same time strengthening the regional commissions, by expanding not only their functions and responsibilities but also their budgetary resources and staff. This movement resulted in the adoption of Economic and Social Council resolution 793 (XXX) in 1960 and General Assembly resolutions 1518 (XV) and 1709 (XVI) in 1960 and 1961, respectively; all these resolutions refer to the decentralization of United Nations economic and social activities and the strengthening of the regional economic commissions.^{3/}

^{1/} The decision was adopted on 16 December 1980.

^{2/} These resolutions were adopted on 20 December 1977 and 29 January 1979, respectively. The report of the Secretary-General is contained in document A/35/546 of 23 October 1980.

^{3/} See also, *inter alia*, the following resolutions adopted subsequently: Economic and Social Council: 823 (XXXII) in 1961; 879 (XXXIV) in 1962; 955 (XXXVI) in 1963; 1440 (XLVII), 1441 (XLVII) and 1442 (XLVII) in 1969; 1530 (XLIX), 1553 (XLIX) and 1555 (XLIX) in 1970; 1601 (LI) in 1971; 1724 (LIII) in 1972; 1756 (LIV), 1817 (LV) and 1818 (LV) in 1973. General Assembly: 1323 (XVII) in 1962; 1941 (XVIII) in 1963; 2563 (XXIV) in 1969; 2626 (XXV), 2684 (XXV), 2687 (XXV) and 2688 (XXV) in 1970; and 1803 (XXVI) in 1971.

As a result, beginning in 1977 and at each of its subsequent sessions, the General Assembly adopted wide-ranging and specific resolutions on the role and functions of the regional commissions in the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system, beginning with resolution 32/197, the annex of which, in section IV, on the structures for regional and interregional co-operation, contains the most thorough legislative statement by the General Assembly with regard to the contribution expected from the regional commissions since the Economic and Social Council adopted the terms of reference of each commission. Resolution 32/197 defines more clearly the functions established for them in their terms of reference, as well as indicating new functions and responsibilities.

In addition, in resolution 33/202, section IV, operative paragraph 3, the General Assembly decided that the regional commissions "should have the status of executing agencies in their own right", thus implementing the recommendation to that effect in paragraph 23 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 32/197 and in Economic and Social Council resolutions 1978/74 and 1979/64 of 4 August 1978 and 3 August 1979, respectively.

Furthermore, General Assembly resolution 34/206 of 19 December 1979 stresses the need to adopt more energetic measures to implement the principal provisions of resolution 32/197, and requests the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of these measures to the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session, which is to be held this year.^{4/}

For its part, at its fourteenth session, held in Santiago, Chile, from 27 April to 8 May 1971, the Commission examined the future role of CEPAL in the rationalization of the regional structures of the United Nations, for which purpose the Secretariat submitted a document under that title on the matter.^{5/}

On that occasion, the Commission adopted a consensus containing declarations on the regional structure of the United Nations; the geographical distribution of the subsidiary organs and specialized agencies of the United Nations (subregional and regional); relations and co-ordination between CEPAL and other agencies of the United Nations system; the rationalization

^{4/} The provisions referred to are the following: (a) the functions of the regional commissions "as the main general centres of economic and social development within the United Nations system for their respective regions"; (b) participation in the operational activities of the United Nations system; (c) delegation of authority and adequate budgetary and financial allocations and redeployment of posts from United Nations Headquarters to the regional commissions; (d) distribution of tasks and responsibilities among the regional commissions and other United Nations organizations, organs and programmes; (e) collective involvement of the countries of each region in the preparation of the regional programme of the United Nations Development Programme and in priority-setting for co-operation between UNDP and the regional commissions.

^{5/} See document E/CN.12/895 and Adds. 1 and 2.

of the conferences and meetings convened by the subsidiary bodies and specialized agencies of the United Nations system; the strengthening of CEPAL and the rational and effective decentralization of economic and social activities of the United Nations, including its operational activities; the role of CEPAL in the United Nations Development Co-operation Cycle; and the structure for economic and social information and documentation at the regional level.^{6/}

Subsequently, at its eighteenth session, held in La Paz from 18 to 26 April 1979, CEPAL adopted resolution 405 (XVIII) on the decentralization of United Nations activities. In that resolution, after recalling the contents of section IV of the annex to General Assembly resolution 32/197, considering that for the purposes of decentralization due account should be taken of the "operational activities, research and analysis which the Secretariat of the Commission can carry out more efficiently on behalf of its member States", and recognizing that CEPAL is perfectly equipped to operate independently in adapting global principles and policies and to furnish the required framework at the regional level, it requested, inter alia, that the United Nations Secretary-General should take steps to implement the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council resolutions "in order to confer on the Commission full rights to act as executing agency for the categories of projects described in General Assembly resolution 32/197 annex, paragraph 23"; to adopt the necessary measures to decentralize the appropriate research and analysis activities from Headquarters to the Secretariat of the Commission; and to make available to CEPAL adequate budgetary and financial resources so that the Secretary of the Commission may be in a position to implement the new tasks accompanying decentralization.

The United Nations General Assembly has not yet concluded its examination of the implications for the regional commissions of the new functions envisaged in the framework of the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system, nor has it considered exhaustively the financial and budgetary consequences for the commissions of their undertaking the responsibilities assigned to them in the above-mentioned resolutions. These topics will once again be discussed at the thirty-sixth session of the General Assembly in accordance with decision 35/440 of 16 December 1980, on the basis of the reports to be submitted by the regional commissions after they have considered these matters at their respective 1981 sessions, and of the Secretary-General's report requested by the General Assembly in operative paragraph 6 of resolution 34/206, of 19 December 1979.

Both the Secretary-General in his report and the regional commissions in theirs are to indicate the measures taken to implement the General Assembly resolutions on restructuring. In the case of CEPAL, the Commission could propose the measures and guidelines it considers appropriate for the Secretariat to be in a position as an institution effectively to implement the decisions and mandates set forth in those resolutions.

^{6/} See document E/CN.12/867/Rev.2

The purpose of this note is therefore to facilitate the formulation of proposals concerning those aspects which are considered appropriate, taking as a frame of reference the report of the Secretary-General on the implications of General Assembly resolutions 32/197 and 33/202 for the regional commissions, submitted at the thirty-fifth session of the General Assembly, as well as the resolutions themselves.7/

1. Role of the regional commissions within the United Nations system

The report of the Secretary-General (A/35/546) contains a thorough and detailed analysis of the implications of these resolutions for the regional commissions. It also gives an idea of the immediate programme needs which must be met at the regional level within the process of restructuring the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system, and of the expanded functions of the regional commissions pursuant to those resolutions.

In this connexion, it should be borne in mind that paragraph 19 of the annex to resolution 32/197 defines the role of the regional commissions, under the authority of the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council, as the "main general economic and social development centres within the United Nations system for their respective regions", with some conditions relating to the undertaking of those functions. The report of the Secretary-General mentions in this regard that the regional commissions are called upon to perform, at the regional level, consultative and policy-setting functions akin to those performed at the global level by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, from which the regional commissions receive the necessary authority and responsibility as "regional arms" of the organization. Thus, in order to arrive at a general definition of the authority and mandates envisaged for the regional commissions in resolution 32/197, the provisions of the latter in this respect should be examined and interpreted together with those sections of the resolution concerning the role and functions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.8/

The Secretary-General's report identifies five spheres in which the expanded role and new functions of the regional commissions in the framework of the recommendations contained in the annex of resolution 32/197 may be specified more clearly. These spheres include the following:9/

7/ Document A/35/546, and resolutions 32/197 and 33/202.

8/ See resolution 32/197, annex, sections I and II.

9/ See document A/35/546, paragraphs 13 to 20 and 77; the document refers to paragraphs 19 to 27 of resolution 32/197, annex, section IV.

(a) consultative and policy-making function with regard to economic and social activities at the regional level under the authority of the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council;

(b) leadership function, in specified conditions, for the joint efforts of the United Nations system for the development of regional co-operation and co-ordination and priority-setting in the field of economic and social development;

(c) involvement in decision-making concerning programme requirements and medium-term planning in respect of activities undertaken by the regional commissions and in the definition of objectives covered by the medium-term plan;

(d) the function of executing agency for intersectoral, subregional, regional and interregional projects, in specified conditions, and for the promotion of co-operation among developing countries at the subregional, regional and interregional levels;

(e) responsibility for the continuous exchange of information and experience among the various regional commissions, as a means of promoting interregional co-operation.

As mentioned above, section IV of the annex to General Assembly resolution 32/197 contains the most comprehensive statement by the General Assembly so far on the role of the regional commissions within the United Nations system since the adoption of their terms of reference. In this connexion, it should be recalled that CEPAL was set up by the Economic and Social Council at its sixth session, through resolution 106 (VI) dated 25 February and 5 March 1948, to collaborate with the governments of Latin America in the search for solutions to the economic and social development problems of their countries, the improvement of the standard of living of their peoples, and the maintenance and strengthening of the economic relations of the Latin American countries among themselves and with those of other geographical regions. These mandates and terms of reference, however, do not set forth the role or functions of the regional commissions within the general structure of the United Nations and as part of its system of organizations for development.

In resolution 32/197 the General Assembly clarifies their role and functions, and indicates their ensuing tasks and responsibilities. The recommendations and statements in section IV of the annex to that resolution expand the terms of reference and authority of the regional commissions, thus explicitly recognizing their importance and the need to achieve complementarity within the activities of the economic and social programmes of the United Nations system at the world, interregional and regional levels, as well as better co-ordination among the bodies of the system, including the regional commissions.

2. Co-ordination and co-operation at the regional level

Paragraph 20 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 32/197 refers to the regional commissions' responsibility for co-ordination of the pertinent economic and social activities of the United Nations system in their own regions.

In turn, the report of the Secretary-General refers to the co-ordination functions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, and mentions two responsibilities for the regional commissions, namely:^{10/}

(a) to be instrumental in transmitting to their member countries guidelines and priorities established by the United Nations system at the global level; and

(b) to formulate suitable guidelines and priorities for relevant economic and social activities of the United Nations system in their respective regions.

Thus, the proposals in the report of the Secretary-General for follow up activities for which the regional commissions should be responsible pursuant to paragraph 20 of the annex to resolution 32/197 include:^{11/}

(a) measures for improved interagency co-ordination at the governmental level, in the case of regional activities organized by the United Nations system of organizations or sponsored by them (for example, joint programming of regional meetings, prior consultations on the agenda and venue of a meeting with those organizations of the system which organize periodic regional meetings or have set up regional committees or subsidiary bodies);

(b) measures for improved co-ordination, at the secretariat level, among organizations of the United Nations system undertaking regional programmes and activities, including the feasibility and desirability of making formal arrangements at the regional level similar to the intersecretariat arrangements at the global level envisaged in section VII of the annex to General Assembly resolution 32/197;^{12/}

(c) the involvement of the regional commissions in the arrangements for global co-ordination at the secretariat level, particularly the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) and its subsidiary bodies;

(d) concrete action initiated by the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme pursuant to the decisions of the Economic and Social Council and General Assembly to improve the collective involvement of the developing countries of each region in priority-setting for their regional programmes for the third UNDP planning cycle (1982-1986).^{13/}

^{10/} See paragraph 21 of document A/35/546.

^{11/} See paragraph 25-27 of document A/35/546.

^{12/} See in particular paragraphs 52 and 54 of the annex to that resolution.

^{13/} See paragraph 23 of document A/35/546 and section V of decision 79/10 adopted by the UNDP Governing Council on 27 June 1979; see also Economic and Social Council resolution 1979/64 and General Assembly resolution 34/206, and CEPAL resolution 387 (XVIII) adopted at its eighteenth session.

Although the terms of reference of CEPAL established that the Commission should take measures to ensure that the necessary liaison is maintained with other organs and agencies of the United Nations system in order to avoid any duplication of efforts, they do not explicitly state that the Commission is responsible for co-ordination in the economic and social spheres in the region which it serves.^{14/}

3. Participation in programme planning: biennial
programme of work and medium-term plan

In operative paragraph 21 of its annex, General Assembly resolution 32/197 contributed to a further specification of the role and functions of the regional commissions in regard to programme planning. This paragraph indicates a greater involvement of the regional commissions in decision-making, particularly concerning programme requirements and medium-term planning in respect of activities undertaken by the commissions for the primary benefit of the regional activities of their member countries, including involvement of the commissions in the definition of objectives covered by the medium-term plan.

The recent attention paid by the United Nations to the planning process in all its phases is leading to important changes in current procedures, which will require adjustments in the relevant practices within the regional commissions; it also includes a recognition of the need to improve and strengthen the evaluation process as part of regular planning, programming and budgetary procedures. A third aspect is the need to improve co-ordination and collaboration with United Nations agencies and regional organizations so as to enhance inter-agency programme activities and avoid duplication of efforts and inefficient use of resources in the implementation of programmes.

In addition to the recommendation contained in paragraph 21 to the annex of General Assembly resolution 32/197 on the participation of the regional commissions in the programme planning process, the Secretary-General's report identifies two aspects of the responsibilities of the regional commissions in this respect, namely:

(a) the authority of the commissions with respect to the formulation and approval of programme proposals for inclusion in the programme of work and the medium-term plan covering specifically regional activities; and

(b) the involvement of regional commissions in the formulation of the objectives of global programmes in the execution of which the commissions are expected to participate.^{15/}

^{14/} See paragraph 8 of the terms of reference of CEPAL as adopted by the Economic and Social Council in resolution 106 (VI).

^{15/} See paragraphs 31 and 32 of document A/35/546.

Related measures dealt with in the Secretary-General's report include:^{16/}

(a) regional arrangements aimed at promoting a continuous dialogue between the governments members of the commissions and the respective Secretariats aimed at the integration of sectoral programme inputs and maximizing the responsiveness of the work programme to regional priorities;

(b) synchronization of programme cycles and harmonization of programme formats, particularly between the regional commissions and United Nations bodies operating at the global level;

(c) regular consultations between Headquarters and the regional commissions on the distribution of tasks and responsibilities within the United Nations Secretariat at the global and regional levels in the light of appropriate legislative mandates.^{17/}

In this respect, as the United Nations programme planning process was only established in 1974, the Terms of Reference of CEPAL as approved in Economic and Social Council resolution 106 (VI) do not contain specific provisions governing the involvement of the Commission in it.^{18/}

4. Regional contribution to global policy making

Paragraph 21 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 32/197, already quoted elsewhere in this note, mentions that the regional commissions "should provide inputs for the global policy-making processes of the competent United Nations organs and should participate fully in the implementation of the relevant policy and programme decisions taken by these organs".^{19/}

For its part, the report of the Secretary-General suggests some procedures for ensuring that this objective is attained in the decision-making process in the intergovernmental sphere, at the world and regional levels, and indicates the following aspects of the relations between regional and global structures which appear to deserve particular attention:^{20/}

^{16/} Ibid., paragraphs 29, 33 and 34.

^{17/} A series of such consultations were initiated during 1980-1981 concerning the programme sectors of water and environment, respectively.

^{18/} Since 1974, the United Nations has had a biennial programme budget which is drafted in the framework, at present, of a six-year medium-term plan. This plan is revised by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC), a body composed by representatives of 21 member States reporting to the General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council.

^{19/} See also paragraphs 1 to 5 of the annex to resolution 32/197, which are linked with paragraph 21.

^{20/} See paragraphs 36 to 40 of document A/35/546.

(a) the use of the structures of the regional commissions for holding consultations at the regional level with a view to the preparation of intergovernmental conferences at the world or interregional level, including special meetings organized or sponsored by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and other organs of the United Nations system, where timing and subject matter allow it;

(b) the provision of secretariat support services to the governments of the member countries of the regional commissions for specific negotiating purposes;

(c) consultations, at the secretariat level, between United Nations Headquarters and the regional commissions concerning the most effective form of implementing the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council on the one hand, and by the regional commissions on the other;

(d) the strengthening of the capability of the secretariats of the regional commissions in both quantitative and qualitative terms, with respect to data collection and analysis relating to national economic and social development in their respective regions, with a view to expanding the scope and quality of the services offered by these secretariats to support United Nations programmes and activities at the regional, interregional and world levels.

In this connexion, it should be pointed out that although the terms of reference of the Commission state the support functions of CEPAL in this regard,^{21/} they do not clearly establish its responsibility in terms of providing regional inputs for the global policy formulation process and in participating fully in the regional implementation of the policy and programme decisions taken at the world level.

5. Common definitions of regions and subregions

Paragraph 22 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 32/197 recommends that "the organization of the United Nations system should take early steps to achieve a common definition of regions and subregions and the identical location of regional and subregional offices".^{22/} This section refers to the geographical coverage of the regional offices of the United Nations Development Programme and its relationship with the composition of the regional commissions and the various regional structures of the specialized agencies of the United Nations system; it also deals with the liaison arrangements between them and the regional commissions and subregional levels, in those cases where the regional commissions have established subregional offices.

^{21/} See in particular paragraphs 1 (e) and 5 of the terms of reference of the Commission, as adopted by the Economic and Social Council at its sixth session and amended at subsequent sessions.

^{22/} The question of regional structures has been widely discussed for several years in the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly and the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC). For a better and more thorough review of the matter, see the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the regional structures of the United Nations system (E/5727), published two years before the adoption of resolution 32/197. The document contains a study and a detailed analysis of the functions of the regional offices and the definitions of regions and subregions.

In the introduction to this note by the Secretariat, reference is made to the Consensus on the future of CEPAL in the rationalization of the regional structures of the United Nations adopted by the Commission at its fourteenth session. With regard to the question of regions and subregions, the Consensus recommends that "as a general policy measure, the regional and subregional headquarters of the United Nations subsidiary bodies and specialized agencies should, as far as possible, be located in the same places as the CEPAL offices, while those concerned with specific technical fields should be located wherever they can best achieve their objectives".^{23/} It also states that "the trend should be towards greater decentralization or subregionalization in the CEPAL Secretariat's research and operational activities, in the interests of greater efficiency".^{24/}

As recognized in the paragraph 22 of the annex to resolution 32/197, decisions concerning the definition of regions and subregions are the prerogative of the legislative bodies of the various organizations of the United Nations system. In making use of this prerogative, the United Nations Development Programme in 1975 established a liaison office with CEPAL at the headquarters of the CEPAL Secretariat in Santiago, Chile, with a view to improving the programming, implementation, execution and follow-up activities of the country programmes and regional and subregional projects, as stated in operative paragraph 1 of General Assembly resolution 3252 (XIX) adopted at its twenty-ninth session. Previously the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Information Centre and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) had already set up regional offices or liaison offices in Santiago, Chile. The United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) set up a liaison unit in Santiago, Chile, in 1979.

At the subregional level, the following organizations of the United Nations system have liaison offices or officials in the same cities where CEPAL has established offices away from Headquarters:

- (a) Bogotá: FAO, UNICEF, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Bank, United Nations Information Centre, UNIDO;
- (b) Buenos Aires: United Nations Information Centre, UNHCR, ILO, WHO, FAO;
- (c) Mexico City: United Nations Information Centre, UNICEF, ILO, UNESCO, WHO, ICAO, FAO;
- (d) Montevideo: UNESCO, WHO, FAO;
- (e) Port of Spain: United Nations Information Centre, ILO, WHO, UNIDO;
- (f) Brasília: United Nations Information Office, UNICEF, ILO, UNESCO, WHO, FAO, UNIDO.

^{23/} The paragraph 432 of document E/CN.12/867/Rev.2 (paragraph 11 of the Consensus).

^{24/} Ibid., paragraph 12 of the Consensus.

6. Operational responsibilities and executing agency status with regard to development activities financed by UNDP

Paragraph 23 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 32/197 recommends that the regional commissions should participate actively "in operational activities carried out through the United Nations system, including the preparation of intercountry programmes, as may be required" and calls for them to be enabled to function as executing agencies for intersectoral, subregional, regional and interregional projects," and, "in areas which do not fall within the purview of the sectoral responsibilities of specialized agencies and other United Nations bodies, for other subregional, regional and interregional projects".

In this connexion, General Assembly resolution 33/202 established that the regional commissions should have the status of executing agencies in their own right in respect of the categories of projects described in paragraph 23 of the annex to resolution 32/197 and in conformity with that paragraph.

For its part, the report of the Secretary-General suggests some aspects to which attention could be paid in the light of the increasingly broad involvement of regional commissions in the operational activities of the United Nations and some organizations of the system:^{25/}

(a) the regional commissions can be instrumental in charting options for economic and technical intercountry co-operation in support of the preparation of project proposals within the framework of the subregional, regional and interregional programmes of the United Nations funding agencies;

(b) the establishment or strengthening of co-operation agreements with specialized agencies of the United Nations system for development in order to optimize the reciprocal benefit of the technical expertise of those agencies and of the regional commissions themselves, thus avoiding the duplication of efforts and resources;

(c) the formulation and application of criteria to facilitate decision-making concerning the designation of executing agencies for specific activities at the regional level, in the light of the operational responsibilities for which the regional commissions are better endowed.

Pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 32/197 and 33/202, since 1 January 1979 CEPAL has been acting as executing agency for various regional projects funded by UNDP and UNFPA. In addition, in recent years CEPAL has concluded a number of special agreements with UNESCO, UNCTAD and FAO whereby it has been associated with those specialized agencies in the execution of specific regional projects for which they were designated executing agencies.

^{25/} See paragraphs 51 and 52 of document A/35/546.

Finally, CEPAL has concluded a number of special association agreements with the United Nations Department of Technical Co-operation for Development for the execution of country projects in economic planning and population; this has made it possible to take advantage of the great expertise of the Latin American Institute for Economic and Social Planning (ILPES) and of the Latin American Demographic Centre (CELADE), which are integral parts of the CEPAL system.

In determining the regional projects for which CEPAL was given the status of executing agency and the country projects executed by other specialized agencies of the United Nations in association with CEPAL, account was taken, inter alia, of the following criteria established by the Secretariat for performing these functions:

- (a) that the project topic should be included in the Commission's current work programme;
- (b) that the Secretariat should have already undertaken or be engaged in studies and research on the project topic, so that it is in a position to provide appropriate expertise and conceptual and methodological support for a specific operational activity;
- (c) that the permanent professional staff of the Secretariat should include a minimum number of experts who can provide the necessary technical support for the project personnel;
- (d) that the Secretariat should have adequate operational capacity to administer the project.

Neither paragraph 23 of resolution 32/197 nor resolution 33/202 include country projects among those for which the regional commissions should act as executing agency. However, CEPAL's geographical proximity to all the countries of the region through its headquarters and subregional offices, as well as its substantive, administrative and operational capacity, place it in a privileged position to collaborate, selectively and in accordance with the above-mentioned criteria, in association with the relevant specialized agencies in the execution of country projects in specific economic and social sectors where the Secretariat has broad and continually updated expertise. This is the case, for example, for country projects in the spheres of economic and social planning (general, regional or sectoral), and demography and population; in these areas, CEPAL has two highly specialized institutions with a long tradition in Latin America, namely, ILPES and CELADE, respectively.

7. Regional and interregional economic co-operation
among developing countries

The annex to resolution 32/197 recommends that the regional commissions should intensify their efforts to strengthen and enlarge economic co-operation among the developing countries at the subregional, regional and interregional level.^{26/} At the internal level, it is recommended that they should expand the continuous exchange between them of information and experience, which could be done, for example, through intersecretariat meetings.^{27/}

^{26/} See paragraphs 24 and 19 of the annex.

^{27/} Ibid., paragraph 25.

The report of the Secretary-General refers, inter alia, to the support that can be provided by the regional commissions to intergovernmental co-operation schemes at the intra-regional and interregional levels; co-ordination and co-operation with regional organizations outside the United Nations; joint, co-ordinated programming in spheres of mutual interest to the regional commissions in the field of interregional co-operation; co-ordination and co-operation between the regional commissions and UNCTAD, which has been designated the focal point for economic co-operation among the developing countries; and the use of the conference structure of the regional commissions for the regional preparation of interregional and world negotiations under the auspices of UNCTAD.^{28/}

The note presented by the Secretariat at this session on the action of the CEPAL system concerning the promotion of and support for technical and economic co-operation among developing countries reviews, inter alia, the role of CEPAL in this field, as well as the action it has taken within its own Secretariat and at the interagency, regional and interregional levels.^{29/}

Although the terms of reference of the Commission mention mutual co-operation, indicating that CEPAL should maintain and strengthen "the economic relations of the Latin American countries both among themselves and with other countries of the world",^{30/} they do not clearly reflect this new dimension of international co-operation, namely, technical and economic co-operation among developing countries and regions of different geographical areas.

8. Streamlining the conference and Secretariat structures

In its paragraph 27, the annex to resolution 32/197 recommends that "the regional commissions should rationalize their structures, inter alia, by streamlining their subsidiary machinery" so that they can effectively perform the functions set forth in section IV of the annex to that resolution. In this connexion the report of the Secretary-General identifies some aspects where the conference structures of the regional commissions could provide secretariat and conference services for the holding of intergovernmental consultations on aspects of special interest for member countries or groups of countries; it also states that it is necessary to specify more clearly the modalities and procedures for the regional commissions to be able to use the information and technical expertise available in the various secretariats of the United Nations system, particularly with regard to the preparation of documentation needed for intergovernmental meetings convened or sponsored by the regional commissions.^{31/}

^{28/} See in particular paragraphs 52, 53, 54, 59, 64 and 65 of document A/35/546.

^{29/} E/CEPAL/G.1167.

^{30/} See operative paragraph 1 (a) of Economic and Social Council resolution 106 (VI).

^{31/} See in particular paragraphs 74 and 75 of document A/35/546.

At the fourteenth extraordinary session of the Committee of the Whole of the Commission (New York, 20 November 1980), the Secretariat prepared and submitted a note on the rationalization of the institutional structure and pattern of meetings of the CEPAL system.^{32/} Resolution 419 (Plen.14) was then adopted on this question, which decided basically to maintain the present institutional structure of the CEPAL system and rationalize its machinery, procedures and meetings, with the following adjustments:^{33/}

(a) the dates of the CEPAL sessions should be changed from odd to even years, in order to coincide with the biennial budget programming cycle introduced by the General Assembly;

(b) as a general rule, no more than five substantive conferences or meetings of a regional nature should be held each year;

(c) at each of the Commission's regular sessions, the complete calendar of conferences and meetings planned up to the next regular session should be considered, stipulating, where possible, the date, duration and location of each meeting.

Operative paragraph (b) of the resolution establishes that "at its nineteenth session the Commission should decide on the new calendar of conferences and meetings of the entire CEPAL system with a view to implementing it, duly synchronized with the General Assembly's budget programming cycle, as from 1982 and taking into account the objectives and priorities established in the various work programmes and regional action programmes approved by member governments".

Pursuant to this resolution, the Secretariat has drawn up a table containing the meetings programmed for the biennium 1981-1982, as well as preparations for meetings for the biennium 1983-1984, including not only the statutory meetings whose periodicity is fixed, but also regional preparatory meetings for world conferences and connected with commemorative years.^{34/}

9. Delegation of authority and provision of resources

The restructuring process has posed heavy, and often conflicting demands on the financial resources of the regional commissions. Yet regular budget allocations to the commissions face the full impact of the organization-wide budgetary restraint in recent years. In this respect, General Assembly resolution 32/197 recognizes, in paragraph 26 of its annex, that "adequate budgetary and financial provision should be made" for the activities carried out by the regional commissions pursuant to their strengthened or expanded mandates as laid down in resolutions 32/197 and 33/202.

^{32/} E/CEPAL/G.1137.

^{33/} See document E/CEPAL/G.1142.

^{34/} See document E/CEPAL/G.1152.

In relation to resources requirements, the Secretary-General's report lists three general considerations which might be taken into account in determining the budgetary and financial needs of the commissions,^{35/} including:

(a) regular budget allocations should be provided for the performance of all essential commission functions, including consultative functions;

(b) the determination of adequate levels of regular budget resources for the commissions should be based on the nature of the tasks expected from them in support of both regional development needs and global United Nations functions;

(c) Short-term costs of strengthening the capacities of the regional commissions should be weighed against long-term benefits for the promotion of collective self-reliance in the developing regions.

In this respect, in 1980 a permanent post in the area of social development was redeployed to CEPAL from the United Nations Department of International Economic and Social Affairs as well as one expert post in water resources provided by the United Nations Department of Technical Co-operation for Development from the United Nations regular programme of technical co-operation.

For 1981, the Secretary-General recommended the strengthening of the regional commissions through the provision of additional resources. In the case of CEPAL, the Secretary-General identified two spheres of action which need to be reinforced as a priority, namely: (a) the planning process in all its phases, since the preparation of biennial programmes of work and medium-term plans as required by the Committee on Programme and Co-ordination (CPC), as well as the requirements of this organ for cross-organizational programme analysis, have increased substantially the responsibilities of the CEPAL secretariat; and (b) the promotion of technical and economic co-operation among developing countries since it is expected that the role of the CEPAL secretariat in this area will substantially expand not only as a consequence of the decentralization process but also in the implementation of the mandates, recommendations and decisions as requested in CEPAL resolutions 387 (XVIII) and 405 (XVIII) as well as in the Buenos Aires Plan of Action on technical co-operation among developing countries, in the measures adopted at the Conference on economic co-operation among developing countries held in Mexico City in 1976 and in the medium-term Action Plan for global priorities on economic co-operation among developing countries (Arusha, 1979).

Nevertheless, as the General Assembly in its decision 35/440 of 16 December 1980 endorsed "those immediate programme priorities for 1981 which the regional commissions had approved", only one temporary post for the promotion of technical and economic co-operation among developing countries was approved for 1981. The General Assembly will revert, through the Economic and Social Council, to the question of additional resources for the regional

^{35/} See paragraphs 78 and 79 of document A/35/546.

commissions in its thirty-sixth session and to this end will take into account the proceedings of the 1981 regular sessions of the regional commissions.

A full analysis of long-term budgetary implications of the restructuring process for the regional commissions has not yet been undertaken. The Secretary-General's report recognizes, however, that most commissions, in view of their expanding role and volume of programme activities now make special efforts to secure voluntary contributions supplementing regular budget appropriations for the execution of their programme of work.^{36/} These efforts have been undertaken by the commissions in view of the failure of their efforts in the last three years to obtain adequate financial resources from the regular budget of the United Nations.

The question of disparity between the increasing responsibilities and tasks entrusted to the CEPAL system by member Governments and higher United Nations bodies, and the limited resources placed at its disposal was discussed at the Fourteenth Extraordinary Session of the Committee of the Whole (New York, 20 November 1980).^{37/}

A number of delegations noted with great concern the statement by the Executive Secretary on the increasing difficulties faced by the CEPAL system in obtaining additional resources from the regular budget of the United Nations so as to be able to undertake adequately the activities which the member Governments themselves have established as being undeferable and of high priority. There was among the delegations a clear awareness of the serious constraints on the availability of resources faced by the United Nations Development Programme and by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, as far as Latin America is concerned, so that the prospects for fresh resources from those sources would appear to be rather unpromising. This would pose a very serious problem for the activities of the CEPAL system as a whole, and even more for CEPAL's Latin American Demographic Centre (CELADE) which is mainly funded by UNFPA.

^{36/} Paragraph 78. Ibid.

^{37/} See documents E/CEPAL/G.1138 and E/CEPAL/G.1142.